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AUTHOR Williams, Robert L.; Oh, Eun Jung
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ABSTRACT

Major problems in the American workforce are absenteeism, tardiness, disorganization, off-task behavior, and limited teamwork. Attacking such problems by promoting effective work habits in schools should be an educational priority, with teachers, counselors, and school psychologists all playing a role in the process. Student work habits that can contribute to a more effective and efficient work force are regular school attendance; the punctual accomplishment of work task; orderly management of one's school materials; persistence in on task behavior; openness to supervision; and productive teamwork. Intervention strategies that promote these work patterns include teacher modeling of effective work habits; a classroom setting conducive to good work habits; reinforcement of sound work habits; and systematic assessment of student work habits. Future studies must consider whether work habits learned in school transfer to the adult workplace. (Contains 61 references.) (Author/JDM)

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Student Work Habits: An Educational Imperative

Robert L. Williams[1,2] and Eun Jung Oh

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R. Williams
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[1]Educational Psychology, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN 37996-3400

[2]Correspondence should be directed to Robert L. Williams, Educational Psychology, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN 37996-3400. Phone number: 865 ~~423~~-974-6625; fax number: 865 ~~423~~-974-0135; E-mail: bobwilliams@utk.edu

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Abstract

Major problem areas in the American work force are absenteeism, tardiness, disorganization, off-task behavior, and limited teamwork. Attacking such problems by promoting effective work habits in school should be an educational priority, with teachers, counselors, and school psychologists all playing a role in this process. Student work habits that could contribute to a more effective and efficient work force are regular school attendance, punctual accomplishment of work tasks, orderly management of one's school materials, persistence in ontask behavior, openness to supervision, and productive teamwork. The intervention strategies for promoting these work patterns include teacher modeling of effective work habits, a classroom setting conducive to good work habits, reinforcement for sound work habits, and systematic assessment of student work habits.

KEY WORDS; Work habits; work values; work force; attendance; ontask behavior; punctuality; teamwork

Student Work Habits: An Educational Imperative

The purpose of schooling has been expanded well beyond teaching the three Rs. Social skills, emotional intelligence, and humane values are among the additional priorities for contemporary education. The development of student work habits should also be added to the mix. Although minimal research has addressed the possibility, developing favorable work habits in school could be among the most important contributors to adult success. Haberman (1997) contends that fostering pro-work values is especially important for urban students. He sees urban schools often as modeling and rewarding anti-work behaviors.

The American work force has been maligned by critics both within and outside our society. A prominent Japanese politician ruffled U.S. labor by publicly characterizing the American worker as lazy (Winter, 1992). Certainly, several common tendencies within our work force do suggest less than optimal effort. Absenteeism is considered the most serious problem within both the public and private sectors (Cole & Kleiner, 1992). It affects both the professional ranks and blue-collar jobs (Fraser, 1987). The most frequent type of absenteeism is the one-day absence, which often falls on Monday or Friday. Rather than bona fide

illness, negligible commitment to one's work is a more likely cause for these absences.

Even when on the job, the American workers' productivity and efficiency could be questioned. Such tendencies as arriving late, taking frequent breaks, having long lunches, overlooking details, and engaging in personal business during work hours have detracted from both the quantity and quality of work produced (Pulich, 1991). For example, one project engineer who had worked in a variety of auto plants reported that up to half of the hourly workers' time was devoted to such personal activities as reading magazines and taking naps (Winter, 1992). In some circles, peer pressure is directed more toward constraining one's efforts rather than maximizing one's work accomplishments.

Performance in the work place is also curtailed by lack of literacy, technical, and social skills among American workers. For example, it is estimated that at least 5% to 10% of American auto workers are illiterate (Winter, 1992). Although able to read and write at an elementary school level, many workers cannot read well enough to follow written instructions or understand technical reports. A direct correlation between worker literacy and quality of performance is found in some industries.

The Japanese have led the way in underscoring the importance of teamwork. Although many American companies are now instituting cooperative work groups, such companies have traditionally emphasized worker independence and competition. This mentality may lead to alienation among coworkers or even attempts to sabotage one another's work. In many industries, labor and management have had a largely adversarial relationship. Industries have discovered, however, that teamwork not only improves worker morale, but quality of performance as well (Morley & Heraty, 1995).

Students' orientation to school work could contribute to adult work in two ways: (a) exemplary work habits in school may transfer to the workplace; (b) constructive work habits may lead to academic and social skills useful in adult work. Ironically, the efficacy of student work habits has not been a popular research theme in the educational literature. This article pieces together the limited research available on this topic and highlights areas of needed research.

A variety of educators must play a critical role in the promotion of effective work habits in school. For example, the academic or behavioral problems referred to school psychologists may have work habits components that could be addressed more

readily than students' intellectual or emotional characteristics. Work habits also would seem to be a highly relevant issue in the counselor's discussion of career possibilities. Additionally, counselors can help students examine the impact out of school activities (e.g., watching TV, playing video games, and working part time) on their success in school. The teacher, most of all, is on the front line every day in dealing with the immediate consequences of student work habits.

Problem Areas in Student Work Habits

In general, how could the work habits of most American students best be characterized? Although some students are repeatedly disruptive and others consistently ontask, a majority have been characterized as passively compliant (Spaulding, 1992). They do the bare minimum, showing little initiative and enthusiasm about learning. If they exhibit that same orientation in the work place, they will hardly be valued employees.

Student Characteristics

One of the most mysterious work tendencies is what Bruns (1992) calls "work inhibition." This construct is operationally defined as consistently failing to complete school assignments in all subjects for at least two years. Bruns contends that as many as 20 percent of public school children may fall in this

category, with 3 out of 4 work-inhibited students being boys. The pattern seems to be unrelated to socioeconomic level and typically does not include a high level of disruptive behavior. The paradox of work inhibition is that virtually everyone in the child's support network tries to promote the child's achievement. Parents, in particular, may make herculean efforts to get the child academically mobilized.

Another student characteristic that undermines learning is procrastination. By putting things off, students make tasks increasingly difficult and fail to maximize the benefits of task completion. A task completed belatedly may not produce the same dividends as one completed on time. Procrastination has been operationally defined as failure to turn in at least 25% of one's work (Morse, 1987). Procrastinators usually have good intentions, worry about what they have not done, ignore negative feedback, and resent being reminded of work yet to be done (Broadus, 1983). They appear to inflate the difficulty of tasks or, perhaps, underestimate their ability to meet task demands. Such phrases as "this is too hard" and "I can't do this" are common. Whether such phrases primarily reflect low self-efficacy regarding work tasks or antipathy to hard work is difficult to say. A fundamental

impediment to work initiatives appears to be the lack of an organized strategy for attacking tasks.

Giving up easily is a characteristic closely linked to procrastination. Unfortunately, children who give up easily in one situation are likely to do so in other situations (Hamilton & Gordon, 1978; Stipek, Roberts, & Sanborn, 1980). Thus, the tendency to give up in the face of difficulty may be more of a trait than a state. On the other hand, children who persist at tasks learn more than those who give up when tasks become arduous (Stipek, 1983).

Out of School Choices

Student choices about their use of time outside of school can undermine their effectiveness in the classroom. One of the most critical choice areas is television viewing--both how much TV is viewed and what programs are viewed. Regrettably, children who watch TV the most also are the most likely to watch programs having little educational value (Fetler & Carlson, 1982). Students from a lower socioeconomic background are most inclined to follow this pattern. Nonetheless, heavy TV viewing may produce a greater decrement in the academic achievement of students from professional families than in the achievement of students from less educated families (Fetler, 1984). Perhaps there is a greater

contrast between TV viewing and other options (e.g., books, magazines) readily available to children in professional families than there is for children in less educated families. Overall, it is heavy TV viewing, rather than moderate viewing, that is counter to academic performance. In fact, viewing up to 10 hours a week has been positively linked to school achievement.

As students progress to the high school years, increasing numbers are working part-time--with work being a major priority for many of these students (Kablaoui & Pautler, 1991). Part-time work experience can be vocationally beneficial if students have an opportunity to develop skills useful in future employment (Stern, Finkelstein, Stone, Latting, & Dornsife, 1995). Even if jobs available to students involve repetitive tasks and low pay, one might assume that part-time work would sensitize students to the importance of preparing for better job opportunities. Regrettably, many teenagers who work part-time may not be thinking long-term, but rather seeking short-term monetary payoffs (Jesse & Marquart, 1992). They often spend most of their pay on personal luxuries and drugs (Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986).

Working part-time has not contributed consistently to performance in school. Heffez (1997) attempted to improve

academic achievement by providing part-time work experiences during the school year and full-time work during the summer. Disappointingly, these work experiences did not increase grade point average. Homework is especially likely to suffer from after-school work commitments (Stern et al., 1995).

Under the right circumstances, however, part-time work could enhance schoolwork. As with television, the key issue appears to be the amount of time that students devote to part-time work. Cheng (1995) found that working up to 15 hours a week was associated with greater time invested in homework and extracurricular activities, as well as with a lower dropout rate. In some cases, such students are saving money for future educational opportunities (Wirtz, Rohrbeck, Charner, & Fraser, 1988).

On the other hand, choosing to work 20 or more hours a week is often prompted by disinterest in school and followed by increased disengagement from school (Steinberg, Fegley, & Dornbusch, 1993). In general, students who work more than 15 to 20 hours a week make lower grades, are more likely to drop out of high school, and are less likely to complete postsecondary programs (Stern et al., 1995). Some work experience may be beneficial, but a lot of work may undermine school success.

Important Work Habits to Promote

Our analysis of critical work habits in school will closely correspond to work habits that could contribute to success in the work place. These habits include attending school regularly, meeting commitments in a timely fashion, keeping one's work space and work materials organized, sustaining concentration on work tasks, seeking and using supervisory feedback, and being able to work effectively with other students. These types of work habits become especially important in the high school years as students near entry into the adult work force, but their importance can be seen even as early as preschool (Stipek, 1983).

School Attendance

No one can take full advantage of school opportunities without being present on a regular basis. Absenteeism is especially damaging in academic programs requiring sequential learning (Ediger, 1987). School attendance could best be characterized as a necessary but not a sufficient condition for academic success. Missing school establishes a vicious cycle that is likely to become worse with time. As students miss school, they get further behind in their work and the quality of their work suffers. Poor performance is likely to make school more frustrating and less reinforcing, leading to increased

absenteeism (Georgiady & Romano, 1994). This cycle is especially pronounced for special students (such as learning disabled, mildly retarded, and emotionally disturbed), resulting in higher rates of absenteeism than for regular students (Weitzman, 1985). Research at the high school level shows that absenteeism is also substantially higher in inner-city schools than in other high schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 1996).

Students' school attendance may predict their eventual job attendance. Although research has not addressed this possibility, the regular attender in school may become an adult worker who is consistently on the job. The regular attender is also likely to develop the literacy, technical, and social skills that greatly increase the chances for adult success. The relationship between attendance and school achievement holds true for both regular and learning-disabled youngsters (Heberling & Shaffer, 1995). Student attendance consistently predicts performance on standardized achievement tests as well as grades (Lamdin, 1996).

Timely Accomplishment of Work Tasks

Punctuality makes a difference in most school activities. The time when one arrives at school, completes assignments, and prepares for examinations could make a big difference in one's academic success. Surprisingly, no recent research has directly

addressed this linkage. Research several decades ago (Dudycha, 1936; Turney, 1930), however, suggested that punctuality is related to measures of intelligence and grades earned. Dudycha reported that students who are consistently late in meeting their commitments may not recognize this pattern as a problem. Believing that they get things done just in time, they are not particularly motivated to improve their time management. Thus, their poor time management is compounded by their indifference to timely completion of tasks.

Availability and Organization of Materials

Worker performance is often undermined by poor organization of one's work materials. The sheer amount of clutter at one's work station may undermine finding what one needs for a particular task. Plus, the disarray can greatly undermine one's concentration on the task at hand. Companies are discovering that office clutter can diminish the achievement of their mission (Sanders, 1994). Unfortunately, the tendency to be messy may reflect a well-established personality characteristic. Williams, Verble, Price, and Layne (1995) found that organization of physical space was the self-management factor most strongly related to college students' scores on the Myers-Briggs Type

Indicator (Myers & McCaully, 1985), especially the Judgment-Perception index.

Organizational problems are legion within the classroom. Even materials as basic as paper and pencil and the textbook are often forgotten by students; other materials are lost or misplaced. The jumble of materials in the student's desk or locker bodes against efficient retrieval of necessary materials. Research (Kops & Belmont, 1985) has shown that low-achieving students typically have difficulty in organizing their work on school tasks and in selecting the right materials for the task at hand. Thus, students need to be taught how to select task-related materials and how to arrange their materials to permit efficient retrieval of what is needed (Georgiady & Romano, 1994). Although there is practically no research on student orderliness in the management of materials, some research (Doherty & Conolly, 1985) does suggest that student tidiness will likely elevate the teacher's rating of a student's performance.

Task Persistence

The work habits addressed thus far will put students in a position to take advantage of learning opportunities at school. But students can still underachieve if they do not stay focused on the task at hand. Ontask behavior has been a strong correlate

of academic performance (Cobb, 1972; Prater, Hogan, & Miller, 1992; Soli & Devine, 1976; Wheldall & Panagopoulou-Stamatelatou, 1991). Such behavior includes looking at the teacher as he or she gives instructions, taking notes as the teacher is talking, asking questions of the teacher, responding to teacher questions, and remaining actively engaged in independent and small-group learning activities. Unfortunately, many urban students stay on task no more than about 20% of the time and their patterns of work tend to be disjointed (Haberman, 1997).

Openness to Supervision

How the student responds to supervision is another important facet of work habits. Does the student accept supervision when given and ask for supervision when needed? Although teachers and employers value independent workers, all workers periodically need instruction and feedback. Students need to know when to request assistance, make sure they understand instructions, tactfully express reservations about specified directions, and then follow through with the recommended action.

First of all, students need to know when and how to ask for assistance. It is often better to ask for help early than to compound one's errors by proceeding with a flawed work strategy. To get the needed input, students must learn how to precisely

pinpoint what they do not know. A broad question, such as "How do I do this?" may not yield the specific information needed to complete a task. A way to maximize explicit and relevant feedback is to identify the exact point where task performance broke down and the strategies used in attempting to transcend the impasse.

In preparing troubled youth for on-the-job success, Wells (1991) has underscored the importance of teaching them how to interact respectfully with their supervisors, how to clarify confusing directions, how to say "yes" to supervisors, and how to follow instructions. The classroom is replete with opportunities for students to learn these skills. Failure to acquire such skills in school may eventually result in frustration and failure in the work place. One may languish for lack of direction or become discouraged and quit in the face of supervisory directives and criticism.

Team Performance

In recent years, industry has definitely moved in the direction of employees working together as teams (Erdman, 1992). Solitary individual effort and individual competition among workers is viewed as less helpful than the sharing of ideas, building a collaborative approach to problem solving, and accomplishing team goals. Although some specific tasks are still

done individually, larger tasks are often done on a team basis. Regrettably, schools have traditionally required students to work individually and often competitively (Slavin, 1984).

In some instances, schools have deliberately separated students in the performance of work tasks. That is especially the case when students aggressively posture toward one another (Haberman, 1997). While perhaps necessary over the short-run, simply separating adversarial students does nothing to teach them how to work with individuals whose values and actions conflict with their own. The challenge is to help students see that more is to be gained by teamwork than by continuing conflict. Although often not appreciated, teamwork skills are surely among the most important skills that students can learn at school.

School Strategies for Promoting Effective Work Habits

An overall approach for developing good work habits among students involves the following sequence of steps: (1) teacher and students identify the desired habits (what we attempted to do in the previous section), (2) teacher models good work habits, (3) teacher creates a physical and academic environment conducive to focused task performance, (4) teacher selectively rewards good work habits, and (5) teacher and students monitor work-related

behaviors. The challenge is to make the classroom a place where effective work habits are expected and rewarded.

Modeling Good Work Habits

A culture of work expectations can develop both in the classroom and in the adult work place. That culture is defined in part by the behavior modeled by those perceived to have power. In the classroom, modeling effective work habits must begin with the teacher and eventually include influential students. It is unlikely that our insistence on good work habits for students will be viewed as credible, if our own work habits are suspect. What we model for our students may be the one most powerful contributor to their work habits.

The teacher's attendance, punctuality, organization of the classroom, and persistence at tasks are abundantly clear to students. For example, a teacher who begins a class or a school day without a clearly articulated plan can expect no better from students. Confused, misdirected, and off-task behavior are certain to ensue, potentially creating a multitude of discipline problems. Likewise, a teacher who announces planned activities and consequences, but who gets sidetracked from those plans, hardly fosters student delivery on their commitments. A teacher whose handouts are replete with typos and grammatical mistakes

cannot expect students to give close attention to the technical quality of their work. A teacher who fails to return student work in a timely fashion and even loses student work cannot expect students to on top of their work.

Creating a Constructive Classroom Environment

An environment conducive to good work habits begins with physical order in the classroom. The teacher must identify specific places to store materials used by both teacher and students, locate commonly used materials and equipment in readily accessible areas, have a scheme for putting things away when they are not in use, develop a system for minimizing clutter in the classroom, establish a routine for periodically cleaning furniture and work space, and add items that will increase the aesthetic appeal of the classroom (e.g., area rugs, easy chairs, lamps, and paintings).

The major objectives in helping students organize their work spaces are to promote easy retrieval of needed materials and to maximize concentration on the task at hand. Developing a format that students can use in storing materials in their desks and lockers would be advisable. Because these spaces are small, it is all the more important to arrange one's materials in an orderly fashion and to keep those spaces generally free of clutter.

Otherwise, too much time is spent trying to locate needed materials. To optimize focus on the current task, students also should keep their desk tops free of unrelated materials. Having extraneous materials piled on one's desk not only takes up space but serves as a distraction from the immediate task. Finally, student help should be enlisted in keeping the whole classroom orderly. Putting class materials away after use, picking up trash around one's desk, and putting furniture back in its place following activities would be good starters.

Another facet of the classroom environment that will affect the efficiency and persistence of students' on-task behavior is the difficulty of the tasks assigned. In working with preadolescents having behavior disorders, DePaepe, Shores, and Jack (1996) found that difficult tasks produced lower amounts of on-task behavior and higher incidence of disruptive behavior than did easy tasks. Although high-achieving students can likely tolerate greater task difficulty than can low-achieving, even high-achieving students need to experience more success than failure. Dickinson and Butt (1989) found that on-task behavior for both high-achieving and low-achieving students can be optimized if task difficulty is manipulated to ensure at least 70% success.

The difficulty level of a task is directly affected by the clarity of instructions for doing the task. Most of us have had the experience of assembling a mechanical device from a set of written instructions. Although putting the device together should have been relatively easy (at least that's the story we got at the place of purchase), use of technical terminology and omission of steps in the instructions made the task confusing and frustrating. In classroom instruction, task difficulty can be greatly reduced if the teacher divides tasks into smaller steps and then presents those steps in a logical sequence. Perhaps one of the most compelling marks of a good teacher is the ability to execute task analysis until subtasks (steps) are defined at a level the student can manage. Obviously, some students will need smaller steps than others. The challenge is to keep subdividing a task until the target student can proceed with the task.

As students develop literacy skills, it is valuable to provide a written explanation of the steps involved in performing a task. Students may initially understand an oral explanation but later forget critical facets of that explanation. A written explanation can provide the reminders necessary for students to progress efficiently through the steps of the task. Time spent in

writing explicit instructions will be redeemed many fold by the time saved in re-explaining the task to students.

The social arrangement in the classroom is the facet of the classroom environment that most directly affects teamwork skills. One of industry's greatest criticisms of the workers emanating from our schools is that they do not know how to work together (Erdman, 1992). In an effort to increase their profit margin, industries are increasingly using broadly based cooperation among coworkers; representatives from management, design, and production work together on teams.

While some students readily work well with others, most do not naturally develop group skills during their regular school work. As a rule, team skills must be directly taught and practiced to become firmly embedded in the student's behavioral repertoire. Teachers who attempt to use a cooperative learning format can expect to devote at least as much time to developing social skills as to developing academic skills. Although putting students in groups does not assure that they will develop social skills, they most certainly will not develop social skills without some opportunity to work together in the classroom. Academic and demographic diversity among group members appears to extend the benefits of group experiences.

Reinforcing Good Work Habits

Ultimately, the controlling factor of student work habits is reinforcement of those habits. Students are probably less likely than were their parents to inherently value work or see sustained and diligent effort as the road to success. A practice that enables students to continue a devaluing of work is accepting late work, mediocre work, and lame excuses for work not done. We do many things for students that they should do for themselves. This pattern of enabling students is our attempt to please students (as well as their parents and school administrators).

Before we can expect students to improve their work habits, we must stop reinforcing their poor work habits. For example, Haberman (1997) contends that urban schools allow many students to simply show up and do no work, as long as they do not disrupt class. A student who is allowed to be idle in the classroom is unlikely to become a productive adult worker.

When youth do not value work for its own sake or for the benefits that it will bring them, how can we make good work habits important to them? Although not very palatable to those of us who appreciate hard work, one direct approach is to find ways to immediately reward the student for good work habits. Of course, our real agenda is to promote student engagement in

productive work habits until those habits generate their own natural reinforcement. It is not beyond reason, however, that some work tasks (e.g., cleaning the board, picking up clutter) would always have to be maintained through artificial rewards.

Rewarding students for attending school regularly could be a starting point in making good work habits more reinforcing. Suppose students do not like school work, see no intrinsic value in school work, and do not believe that school is instrumental to achieving desired outcomes in their lives. How can we possibly make school attendance rewarding to these students? One study (Licht, Gard, & Guardino, 1991) with special education high school students used a combination of rewards for good attendance and notes to parents about student absences. Students not experiencing this intervention showed substantial declines in attendance as the semester progressed, but students receiving the combination of rewards and parent notices maintained attendance at a high level. Regular attendance puts the student in a position to be academically successful--eventually making attendance naturally valuable to the student (Heberling & Shaffer, 1995; Romer, 1993).

An extrinsic reward approach has also been used to increase punctuality (Johnson, 1995). Middle school students signed in on

a daily time card and received points exchangeable for rewards when they arrived on time for class. Rewards included video game time, items from the school store, and longer lunch periods. In addition to the reward contingencies, a time management workshop was offered to help students alter events contributing to their tardiness. The workshop targeted such strategies as preparing one's clothes the night before school, going to bed earlier, using an alarm clock to wake up, and going to their lockers less frequently. All 20 students in the program earned rewards for timely arrival and reduced class tardies from an average of 15 to 0 a week during the final weeks of the program.

Extrinsic rewards have also been used to promote assignment completion among sixth graders who had rarely completed assignments (Poston, 1991). A behavior contract specifying the contingencies between rewards and weekly assignment completion was developed and signed by the participating parties. Criteria for assignment completion were increased weekly. Rewards included computer play time and bonus points for purchasing items from the school store. Under the reward contingencies, students increased their assignment completion rate by at least 50 to 80%.

The extrinsic rewards need not be tangible items, such as trinkets and edibles. In one high school program, students with

outstanding attendance records were rewarded with such non-material items as certificates, congratulatory letters, and positive phone calls to parents (VanSciver, 1986). Rewards can also consist of activities readily available in the classroom. For example, access to a microcomputer during free time decreased the tardies and improved the achievement levels of one middle school boy (Inkster & McLaughlin, 1993). Similarly, Johnston and McLaughlin (1982) used contingent free time to increase assignment completion while maintaining accuracy of work by an underachieving seven-year-old.

Even though contingent privileges can be used to improve a variety of work habits, tangible rewards may remain the most powerful incentives for many students. For example, VanSciver found that awarding school T-shirts to the homeroom with the best attendance record had a more pronounced effect on student attendance than did less tangible rewards (e.g., congratulatory letters, positive phone calls to parents). The group nature of the reward contingency undoubtedly enhanced its effectiveness.

In promoting teamwork, reinforcement must be provided for both individual and group accomplishments to maximize the performance of group members (Slavin, 1984). Having students work together on a project or on a test review is not likely to be

effective if students are then evaluated only on an individual basis. Conversely, if rewards are available only for group products, some students may contribute little to the group's performance. In fact, the brightest and most energetic members of the group may do most of the work unless each member's contribution to the group outcome is determined and consequated. Thus, for teamwork to be most productive, team members must be evaluated and rewarded on both an individual and group basis.

Assessing Student Work Habits

To determine the impact of their interventions on student work habits, educators must have a systematic procedure for assessing the occurrence of the targeted habits. Many work-habit dimensions (e.g., attendance, tardiness, assignment completion, late assignments, and quality of assignments) will be reflected in the teacher's regular records. A more intricate analysis of work habits may require development of checklists to assess how well tasks are done. For example, if the teacher is trying to promote an orderly work setting, the teacher needs a checklist of organizational tasks (e.g., trash picked up around one's desk, materials put away when not in use, work space clear of unnecessary materials). Such assessments can be done periodically, most especially before interventions are applied

and then at different stages of treatment application, to determine if the student's work habits are improving.

Perhaps more important than having the teacher assess student work habits is to have the students assess their own work habits. Self-assessment not only provides useful evaluative information, it may also have a reactive impact on the behaviors being assessed. For example, one of the best ways to help students maintain their focus on the task at hand is to teach them self-monitoring strategies, which typically involve self-observation and self-recording of the target behavior (Nelson, 1977). The intent is to help students improve performance by becoming more aware of how they are progressing with their work (Mace, Brown, & West, 1987). Poor achievers consistently fail to monitor and evaluate their work (Kops & Belmont, 1985). Consequently, they may feel they are working well, when systematic monitoring would reveal the contrary.

The self-monitoring approach has been used by a wide array of students, ranging from average students to those with severe handicapping conditions (Ballard & Glynn, 1975; Cole, Gardner, & Karan, 1985; Hughes & Boyle, 1991). Self-monitoring has also been applied to a variety of on-task, conduct, and performance indices. Self-recording devices have been diverse, including

wrist counters, pocket-size notebooks, note cards, sticker charts, and performance checklists (Dunlap, Dunlap, Koegel, & Koegel, 1991).

An example of a written checklist has been provided by Anderson-Inman, Paine, and Deutchman's 1984 study of neat paper skills. This checklist was used by resource-room students to improve the appearance of their written work. The checklist included such items as leaving margins on both sides of the page, starting on the front side of each sheet, putting one's name in the proper place, writing a title for the assignment, and staying on the lines with one's writing.

A basic feature of a self-monitoring strategy is teaching the child how and when to record the target response. Oftentimes an unobtrusive cue, such as a beep on an audiotape or an alarm on one's wrist watch, is used. This cuing procedure is typically used when the student is monitoring on-task behavior. When the cue sounds, the student asks himself, "Was I working?" and then marks his record sheet accordingly (Prater, Hogan, & Miller, 1992). If a student is monitoring performance, she simply checks off the different steps in a task as they are completed.

Although some students are so distractible that they will need to continue self-monitoring indefinitely, our goal is to

teach the child to pay attention to his behavior and accomplishments without the use of an artificial recording device. For example, after a child's self-monitoring has been regulated by a systematic external cue, the child can then be asked to self-record whenever he thinks about recording. Ultimately, the teacher wants the child to provide his own cues as to when to self-record.

The fading of external directions and cues is best done gradually. The recording device or checklist can be withdrawn in steps. The intervals between cues for self-recording can also be extended, starting with say one minute and progressing step by step to much longer intervals. If a student is using a performance checklist in doing an academic task (for example, working math problems), he might first apply the checklist after each problem is completed but later after every two problems are completed. Although students with handicapping conditions may require more extended transitions, most students can eventually be weaned from external prompts while maintaining improvement across time and settings (Koegel, Koegel, & Ingham, 1986). It is important for teachers to provide a structure for self-assessment, but students must eventually be able to assess how they are working without constant external reminders.

Concluding Observations

This article has presented a molar analysis of several student work habits that may contribute to adult success: regular attendance, punctuality in meeting commitments, efficient organization of work materials, task persistence, openness to supervision, and teamwork skills. Teachers, counselors, and school psychologists can aid in the promotion of such habits by modeling exemplary work habits, developing a physical and academic environment conducive to effective work habits, and rewarding responsible rather than irresponsible work habits. The assessment and promotion of constructive work habits should be one of the highest priorities of educators.

Perhaps every teacher past and present has been concerned about student work habits, but the research addressing such habits is inexplicably meager. The generic category of ontask behavior is the most widely researched work pattern in the behavioral literature. Other habits, such as organization of one's work space and timely completion of tasks, have received negligible attention. Perhaps the most under-researched issue is the most basic of all: Do work habits learned in school transfer to the adult workplace?

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